

Malcolm
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION A REALITY.

1-17
FUNERAL SERMON,

DELIVERED TO THE
BAPTIST CONGREGATION,

1-17
TUTHILL-STAIRS, NEWCASTLE,

Occasioned by the Death

ANN MALCOLM,

Lord's Day, June 9th, 1799.

BY

THOMAS HASSELL

What cordial joy, what consolation strong,
Whatever winds will, or billows roll,
Our int'rest in the Master of the storm!
Cling *there*; and in wreck'd nature's ruins smile;
While vile apostates tremble in a calm.

Youno's Night Thoughts.

Newcastle:

PRINTED BY M. ANGUS.

1799.

TO THE READER.

THE Author of the following Discourse thinks it proper to say, that he does by no means obtrude it upon the few into whose hands it may come, as a finished piece of composition ; to this he has no pretensions ; but being requested, by those who heard it, he embraces the present opportunity, of complying with their wishes in publishing it. Praying that a Divine blessing may accompany it ; and hoping that it may be read with the greatest candour.



A
FUNERAL SERMON, &c.

PHIL. i. 21 & 23.

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.

IN attempting to improve the departure of our dear young friend, our object is not to bestow encomiums on the deceased, but to admire the grace of God, that influenced the life and made easy the passage of death. The happiness which a believer in Christ experiences in the near approach of death, is the most refined and reasonable in its nature. A man entirely destitute of love to God, may possess a very great share of fortitude, even in his dying moments; but his heart being unacquainted with evangelical holiness, his fortitude deserves no better name than that of insensibility. Almost all men try to reconcile themselves to the stroke of death, either by their repentance before God, or their commending themselves to men. This stills their minds which would else accuse them.

And

And should they be wounded in spirit, on account of their past behaviour, they endeavour to renew their repentance, or extenuate their guilt; by calling upon those around them, to recollect, that they have done some actions which they hope will merit the favour of God. The sincere Christian wishes to keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man; but his pleasure arises not so much from the latter, as from the former. After he has surveyed the benevolence of his heart towards his fellow Christians, and fellow men; his zeal, however burning, for the interest of his Lord and Master; his constant and uniform attachment to the service of his God; his pious love to him, "who loved him, and gave himself for him;" he renounces all in point of dependence, and ingenuously confesses "that he is an unprofitable servant." The approbation of mortals to the dying saint would be very unacceptable; and did he not experience the friendship of Christ, it would be as unpleasant as the "tinkling cymbal." A venerable Prelate of the church of England, being asked what he would have for his Monumental Inscription, replied with great seriousness, it shall be very short. It is included in these two lines:—

"Here lies entombed beneath this stone,

"A sinner saved by grace alone."

Real

Real religion exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, promotes holiness of heart, and humbles the sinner in the dust of self-abasement and conscious unworthiness.

In the variegated circles of life how very many are living to themselves, who never think seriously, that it is "in God they live, move, and have their being." Their whole employ seems to be comprehended in "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? where-withal shall we be clothed?" how shall we appear to the greatest advantage at such a place? or how shall we entertain such a company? Amidst all these anxieties, the object that ought to engage their attention, and absorb every other concern, is entirely neglected. Not so the writer of this epistle, his constant aim was, That Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life, or by death. "For me (he says) to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Or, as it is rendered by another translator, "For Christ to me, both in life and death, is gain.*"

Before we enter on a full discussion of our text, it may not be improper to observe, that our dear young friend made choice of this passage as the subject to improve her decease. That it was the genuine sentiment of her heart,

* See Beza on the above text; and also Gilpin's Exposition.

I have no doubt; that she lived in the persuasion of its truth, and died under the same influence, is a matter of great consolation to all who attended her during her illness.

In discoursing from this sweet portion, we shall attend to the following propositions.

I. We propose to shew, that Christ is gain to the Christian, in *life* and in *death*.

II. That the Christian's mind is sometimes suspended, and he knows not which to choose, whether life or death.

III. That his choice is finally determined, by a persuasion, that to depart, and to be with Christ is far better.

Lastly, We intend to apply the subject, and pray that Divine energy may accompany the word to the hearts of all present.

As we intend, in discoursing from our text, to consider it, agreeable to Beza's translation, and the opinion of several eminent expositors; it may not be improper to add, that sometimes the word Christ is used, when the gospel of Christ is intended. The apostle exhorts the believing Romans, "To put on the Lord Jesus Christ." And when writing to the Ephesians, he says, "Ye have not so learned Christ." Meaning, we presume, the gospel of Christ.

This

This idea we wish to adopt at this time, not to the exclusion of Christ himself; for certainly the apostle had determined that to be interested in his Lord and Saviour was the most valuable blessing that a rational being could possibly possess.

Our first proposition is, that the gospel of Christ is the highest advantage to the Christian, in life and in death.

I. Herein the amiable, and righteous character of God is clearly revealed.

Independent of the gospel we never should so fully have known the true God, and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

Respecting the knowledge of the former, it is clearly displayed in the ministry of the latter. "God (says he) is a Spirit, and he that worships him, must do it in spirit and in truth." And as it respects the glories of Christ, we are, excepting a few instances, under an eternal obligation to his Father for revealing them so clearly to us.—Blessed be God, his word is every way adapted to make us wise unto salvation.

When the ministry of the gospel is accompanied with God's power to the hearts of men, they see new objects, hear new sounds, think new thoughts, and perform new actions. And justly

justly it may be said that Christ is *gain* to them. They have *gained knowledge*.

Once they were ignorant of the holiness of God; but now they know that he is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." Once they were unacquainted with the justness of God; but now they behold with pleasure, that he is "a just God and a Saviour." That he is "righteous in all his works and holy in all his ways." Once they were insensible to the *goodness* of God, but now they explore "his tender mercies over all his works, and his compassion vouchsafed to the most unworthy." They were destitute of any just ideas of the amiable perfections of God; but the gospel, which is a divine mirror, reflects the glory of the Lord; it represents his real image; it holds it up to their wondering souls; and they cannot but be astonished, that they should have remained insensible so long to an object possessing such excellencies. "The natural, (or unenlightened) man, discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14.

As it is the province of men to increase in knowledge, and every addition which they receive, will in a greater, or less degree be ad-
van-

In the New Testament we read that Ananias and Sapphira, were struck dead, for having lied against the Holy Ghost, in keeping back part of the price of their possessions. But a more awful representation of God's displeasure to sin is not to be found than that contained in the first chapter to the Romans. The apostle, surveying the depravity of the surrounding Gentile nations, who did not like to retain God in all their thoughts, says, "For this cause God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." To be spiritually acquainted with God, who is the perfection of holiness, and who disapproves of every action in intelligent creatures that is contrary to his own nature, and to his holy law, must be considered, by every true Christian, as a gain that he can by no means fully estimate while in this imperfect state. Nor ought our ideas of sin to be confined to immoral and ridiculous actions; the sacred pages abound with God's displeasure even to the evil thoughts of men's hearts.

From a consideration of the omnipresence of the Almighty, the Psalmist says,

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
And whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend the heavens, thou art there;

IF

If I make my bed in the abyfs, behold thou
art there !

If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the extreme parts of the ocean ;
There alfo thy hand fhall lead me,
And thy right hand fhall hold me.”*

To be fenfible that we are under the guardian care of “ our Father who is in heaven ;” to be taught to addrefs him for our daily bread ; to pray for the affiftance of his holy Spirit, to enable us to forgive thofe who trefpafs againft us ; and to encourage us to expect the forgiveness of all our trefpaffes ; to prevent us from rushing into the way of temptation ; and to deliver us from all evil ; to poffefs us with a determination to afcribe all the glory of our happinefs to him ; if we are taught this heavenly knowledge, by the miniftry of Chrift, we may fafely conclude that “ Chrift is gain to us.”

II. The gospel of Chrift is gain to the Chriftian, inafmuch as he learns the real knowledge of the perfon and offices of Chrift.

An important question was once propounded by the Mefiah to his difciples ; “ Whom do “ men fay, that I, the Son of man, am.” This enquiry extorted from his followers, what were the opinions of the Jews concerning him.

“ And

“ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the old prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God,” Mat. xvi. 16. Had Peter been mistaken in this important article of his faith, Jesus Christ would certainly have set him right; but instead of finding fault with his declaration, he commends him, yea, he blesses him.—This Divine messenger came down from heaven having received his commission immediately from his Father. He had glory with his Father before the world was. “ But when the fulness of the time was come God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And when he bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

lows." Heb. i. 8, 9. This is one of the great mysteries of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." 1 Tim. iii. 16. These truths are evidently revealed in the New Testament, "that all men might honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Hence says our divine Master, "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath everlasting life*, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John v. 23, 24. Whatever perfections are ascribed to the Father are ascribed to the Son of God; "he possesses that eminence of perfections, which constitutes the essence of God; like him he is eternal, like him he is omnipresent, like him he is almighty, he knows all things like him, he possesses the fulness of the Godhead like him, and like him merits the most profound homage of the mind." If angels are commanded to worship him, and they usher him into the world; if they reverence the Son of God, let us not be afraid or ashamed to pay him adoration. That which is most dear to us we may cheerfully commit to his hand.

Stephen

Stephen, when sustaining the most torturing pains, while the Jews were stoning him, with perfect composure of mind, lifted up his soul to heaven, and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Acts vii. 59.

The author of the Epistle to Timothy, when encouraging his son in the gospel of Christ against persecutions, says, "Nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Tim. i. 12. However sublime the testimony of the prophets was, yet their ministrations were eclipsed by the superior light of the gospel of Christ. "Life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel." The ministry of Christ removed the veil from the human heart; every cloud of superstition and idolatry is dispersed when the great Sun of righteousness arises. And blessed be God, our horizon has enjoyed his enlightening and animating beams. Every thing that is essential to the worship of God, every honour that is due to the Lord of life and glory; in fine, all that is necessary for us to know, to practise, and to rejoice in, is written in indelible characters.

III. In the gospel we become acquainted with the moral perfections of Christ.

We

We read of a young Samuel who was an attendant in the house of the Lord ; of a young Timothy who had been acquainted with the scriptures from a child ; but this heavenly prodigy, at the age of twelve years, puts the learned Rabbies to the blush in the temple. Indeed he is the wisdom of God, as well as the power of God. Look at the assiduity of Jesus in doing good. With animation he preaches the gospel to the poor, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. He proclaims liberty to the captive soul. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls." Matt. xi. 28, 29. The patience of Jesus was astonishing, even to his enemies ; his heavenly mindedness was universal and constant ; his prayers were fervent ; his zeal was unwearied ; his obedience was commensurate with the Divine law ; his humility and condescension made a lasting impression on the minds of his disciples ; and his fortitude, even in the garden of Gethsemane, caused those that were about to apprehend him, to fall prostrate to the ground.

His whole life was a *transcript* of God himself, and forms an example which is every way

way worthy of our imitation. The knowledge of a character so glorious may well be said to be *gain* to the Christian.

IV. We will briefly add, that to know Christ in his *sufferings*, and the *power* of his *resurrection* is an inestimable advantage.

To rely on his atoning blood ; to be clothed with his righteousness ; to know that he gave himself a *ransom* for us ; these are blessings of the utmost importance to us in this world. But when we enter into the heavenly state, then that which is perfect will appear, and that which was in part will be *done away*. Often our faith looks back to mount Calvary, and beholds the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. We wonder, and we adore ! We ask the question, " Was there any sorrow like unto the sorrow of the Son of God, which was done unto him, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger."

However inadequate our faith may be fully to form a just idea of the richness of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the pardon of sin, yet we shall know more of its value when we become inhabitants of the celestial city. And respecting the departure of our dear sister in Christ, we do not sorrow as those without hope. She is indeed gone into the world of spirits, and

will never more be seen by us in this vale of tears; nevertheless, we have reason to conclude from the word of God, that when she was "absent from the body, she was present with the Lord." To have lived, would have been to the praise of Christ, and surely to die was gain.

V. To enjoy the transforming influences of the gospel of Christ, is certainly an *invaluable gain* to the Christian.

What empty things are the gains of the merchant; how trifling are the laurels of the conqueror; and how insignificant are the titles and the splendor of the most dignified personages, when compared with the real possessions of the Christian. Every earthly enjoyment is at best but transient. The merchant may risk all his wealth, and in one voyage be reduced to a state of poverty. The conqueror to-day may be a prisoner to-morrow. And the monarch, whose throne appeared secure, may be driven from his kingdom, and forced to seek an asylum in some foreign country. Such is the mutability of fortune. But this is not the case with the Christian's gain; his treasure is in heaven, where the moth cannot corrupt it, neither can the thief break through and steal. His heavenly Father supplies all his need even in this world; he deals out a
daily

daily portion to him, and if his demands be great, he receives great supplies. Thus he is taught to ask that he may receive, to seek that he may find, and to knock that the treasures of grace may be opened to him.

How conspicuous is the change that the grace of God effects in the souls of men.—
 “They are born again; created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works; begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.”

To exchange carnal desires for a sanctified mind; to part with the joys of sense for the mysteries of the gospel; to dispense with the friendship of the world, and to enjoy the friendship of Christ; to be freed from a state of condemnation, and to be justified freely by the blood of Jesus; if cast out by the men of the world, yet chosen of God and precious; to be heirs of God through Christ; to possess a title to heaven, and a meetness for its pure pleasures; if these things are to be enjoyed in believing in Christ, Christ is gain to us in life.

The consolation which the Holy Spirit affords us, which supports our sinking minds from falling into a state of endless despair, and which comforts us in all our tribulations;
 and

and reconciles us to all the dispensations of Providence, makes it evident that for the real Christian to live is Christ, or Christ is gain to him in life.

VI. Christ is the Christian's gain in dying.

It must readily be admitted that all that we can say on this idea of our subject, is but belief, but a belief that has to do with a faithful God, and a belief that, considering the infallibility of the scriptures, is equal to real acquaintance with the circumstance itself. Death is a path that we have not yet trod, yet it is that in which we must all, ere long, walk.

When we realize the pleasing sentiment, that to die is the Christian's gain, we should not be so much afraid of dying. It would be a melancholy consideration, if, in the trying moment, we were deserted by the Lord Jesus Christ; if he refused to listen to our groans; to sympathize with us in our conflicts and weaknesses; and if he left us to struggle in our own strength. Melancholy indeed! but this is not the case, "For when heart and flesh fail, he is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever."

Death will appear *gain* to the believer, if we consider,

i. That at least he *rests from trouble*. All his troubles are now terminated. It is of little im-

importance what men say of him; an ill-natured world may have grieved his spirit, while living, but now he is eternally deaf to the tongue of calumny. "He is now removed to the place appointed for all living, where the wicked cease from troubling him, and where his weary soul is for ever at rest."

Instead of repining at the death of the righteous, we ought rather to bless our God and Father, that they are now unacquainted with those sorrows which were once their almost constant companions. When we stood around the bed of our dear young friend, suppose she had addressed herself to us in this manner: Why do you appear so anxious for me to live? suppose that you, by your kind assistance, could even restore me to health, what can you insure me? Will you promise that my path shall never be darkened by an adverse cloud? Will you engage that my name and character shall never be evil spoken of undeservedly? Will you pretend to say, that I shall not find it to be a world of trouble? We should no doubt have blushed at being asked such questions. Let this consideration then abate our grief.—Altho' our sister had not lived the quarter part of the time that is called the age of man*, yet she had seen enough to convince her, that

the

* She was 16 years old.

the real Christian had to wade through deep afflictions, and great tribulations.

2. To be freed from pain, and delivered from sin, prove that death is gain.

The complicated disorders and long train of diseases to which man is subject, and which he endures, are truly astonishing. Life is a burden to many, and they chuse to die rather than live. How often does the physician prescribe an ingredient that will make the afflicted person, at least for awhile, insensible. If we consider death as a long sleep, or repose, the body shall turn to corruption, and afterward moulder to dust, yet there will be no pain. The union of body and soul will be broken, at least till the morning of the resurrection, when those that sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him.—But at death, there is not only a freedom from pain, but a deliverance from sin. It is the misery of the Christian, to live in a place where sin is, and it will be his gain to be where it is not.—When we leave the place of our residence, and go to any other, either for the purposes of our health, or recreation, it would afford us pleasure if we could get where sin cannot extend its baneful influences, and where our hearts would be unsusceptible of its attack. But when our bodies are deposited in the cold ground, then

“ Sin,

" Sin, our worst enemy before,
 " Shall vex our eyes and ears no more ;
 " Our inward foes shall all be slain,
 " Nor Satan break our peace again."

3. In dying, the Christian obtains victory by the Lord Jesus Christ.

He may reflect with pleasure on that grace whereby he has stood in the evil day. This is the victory with which he has overcome the world, even his faith. As he was superior to its allurements while living, he is not now about to heave a sigh after its enjoyments. Blessed be God he hath other prospects in view. If ever the world had any charms for him, yet now they are eclipsed by the enjoyment of immortal delights.

Nor will the Christian experience a cessation from Satan. One aim of his accuser will be to imbue his mind with despair ; that those who attend his dying bed may conclude that religion is a nonentity. How does he sustain the shock ? By faith in the divine word ; that word encourages his soul to exult, and say, " Thanks be to God who giveth me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord." Here he casts anchor and is secure. The tempest may blow, and the billows roar ; yet amidst the hurricane, Jesus says, " Peace be still."

Should his own heart accuse him, he may acquiesce in the justness of the accusation, but
 instead

instead of yielding to fear, he remembers that it is written, "If our own hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." Thus while he is conflicting with the prince of darkness, and experiences many fears in his own mind, his Lord and Saviour is present, with his Spirit, to support his fainting soul! to strengthen his faith in the word of God, and to help him across the Jordan of death. To have such a Comforter and Deliverer, when heart and flesh fail is a peculiar advantage. And what does that man possess who is destitute of this heavenly blessing?

We will not enlarge upon this head, as it would only be encroaching on what we intend to discuss hereafter.

We proceed to shew,

Secondly, That the Christian's mind is often in suspense, and he knows not which to choose, whether life or death. "For I am in a strait betwixt two."

Had the apostle only considered his trials, which were more in number, and severer, than those of the other apostles; and had he realized the glory that he enjoyed, when he was favoured with the heavenly vision; we may conclude, what his determination would have been, without saying that he was in a strait, and scarcely knew what to choose. But

But the difficulty that he laboured under, was of the same nature with what the real Christian experiences in the present day. This we hope to be able to explain. We observe, That his mind was placed between the objects of sense, and the objects of faith; there were those things that attracted his desires in heaven and in earth.

In this world he was called to be an apostle of the Gentiles, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to poor sinners. In the course of his ministry he had been instrumental in planting many churches, and had begotten many spiritual sons and daughters by the gospel. Such was his zeal in promoting the interest of Christ that he counted not his life dear so that he might finish his course with joy. Truly, his whole soul was absorbed in a desire to preach the gospel to perishing sinners. From hence, we are led to conclude, that it was not an easy thing to break off these attachments. Indeed, we do not know that he possessed any thing of a worldly nature that inclined him in the least to desire to remain here. "He counted every thing but dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord."

Friendship, which is begun on earth, by
kindred

kindred souls; by such whose delight it is to love God and one another; who profess to know Christ, and desire to be conformed to his image; who sustain some peculiar office in the church of God; whatever some may think, yet the thoughts of having it dissolved by death, is like rending the flesh from their bones.

The apostle had ties like a Christian, but above all, he had those ties as a minister, that were much harder to be broken than we can possibly imagine. On the other hand, he had objects of faith that almost inclined him to bid farewell to all his companions in tribulation. By faith he saw the heavenly world, anticipated the pure pleasures that are there to be enjoyed, and almost wished himself there. By faith he realized the employment of the departed saints, and almost wished to mingle with them, in ascribing salvation and honour to God and the Lamb. But still there was one object, of which he says, "Whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory." This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved the apostle, and gave himself for him. And if such was the love which this holy man bore to Christ, that he

he most cheerfully sustained the greatest reproaches for his name's sake; if he determined not to know any thing save Christ and him crucified; we may almost wonder when he tells us, that he is in a strait betwixt two. This hesitation was not the effect of cowardice; altho' his place was the post of danger, yet nevertheless it was the post of honour.

The dying Christian often expresses the same language as that which we have considered in relation to the apostle; viz. "I am in a strait betwixt two." Elijah was mistaken when he thought that he was the only one that feared the true God; for the Lord told him, that he had reserved to himself seven thousand in Israel, that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

We are not so situated, brethren, as only to have one companion in the gospel in a city or a town; and were it the case, the trial would be felt most seriously, to leave that individual Christian to traverse the vale of tears alone. It must be painful to think of parting from those with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and have walked to the house of God together. We have likewise many other things that incline us to remain with our dear brethren in this world.

But the question may be asked, Why is the
desire

desire of young Christians different from the desire of those who are aged? We answer.

Persons who enjoy health, who are in prosperous circumstances, and have contracted the friendship of many pious Christians; may feel a desire to be instrumental in the church of God, to strengthen the weak hands, and to confirm the feeble knees of the mourners in Zion. But these same zealous believers, if the prospect of benefiting the church be cut off, either by illness or infirmity, they will in all probability express themselves in the same manner. A pious and only daughter, whose parents' house, like the house of Obed Edom, is blessed of the Lord; where there is an altar to the Lord God of Israel, to offer up sacrifices well-pleasing to Him, through the mediation of his well-beloved Son; such a place may be considered a Bethel, the house of God, and the gate of heaven; and the pleasure that they enjoy on earth, of the presence and approbation of their heavenly Father, may give birth to a desire, that they may never, never part. They wish not to be separated by death, but if it were the will of God, that as they have lived together, so they may breathe out their last together.

Nor can we imagine, that the subject of this discourse was destitute of ties to hold her spirit

rit from desiring to fly out of the tabernacle. She had acquaintances, she had relations, she had an indulgent and kind father, and a sympathizing and affectionate mother. These, she loved at all times, and therefore it argues an apology for her, when she said, "I am in a strait betwixt two."

2. The littleness of our acquaintance with heavenly things, is another reason why we are often in a strait, and know not what to choose, whether life or death. We know them only by report, though that report be infallible, and sufficient to silence every doubt.

Our faith "is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." God, who well knows what manner of spirits we are, discovers in us the greatest imperfection in the exercise of faith. The unbelief of Thomas was not very unlike the unbelief of some real Christians. He said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe," John xx. 25.

In common, it is true, that we depend more upon our senses than we do upon faith. And, seeing this is the case, that we hesitate to agree, or to give full credit to the evidence of testimony,

mony, and choose rather to venture upon the evidence of the object, it cannot be wondered, if in seasons of partial unbelief we should desire to remain in the flesh. No man hath ever ascended into the heavenly world, to inform us what is the employment, or in what manner the saints are preserved immortal.

"All that we know they do above,

"Is that they sing, and that they love."

Indeed it has never entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has laid up for those that love him; but what Jesus said to his disciples, is applicable to us, "What ye know not now, ye shall know hereafter."

3. The fearful apprehensions that we have entertained about death, operate on our minds, and we are unwilling to die. Surely, there is nothing in death itself that is desirable. The strongest believer in the Lord Jesus, does not desire death, merely because he may die, but rather that he may be absent from sin, and present with the Lord.

"Imagination's fool, and error's wretch,

"Man makes a death which nature never made;

"Then on the point of his own fancy falls;

"And feels a thousand deaths, in fearing one."

YOUNG.

On the banks of a river in the summer season, when our youths have stripped off their clothes to bathe, we sometimes behold a picture

ture of the timid Christian: They skip to and fro on the margin; now they appear determined to plunge in, but fear takes hold of them, and they linger, they shiver, they draw back, and fear to launch away. Even so it is with the faint. Between the objects of sense, and the objects of faith; between the exercise of believing, and doubting; between what it is to live, and what it is to die; the Christian says, I am in a straight betwixt two; yet what I shall choose, I know not.

But we proceed to shew,

Thirdly, That the Christian's choice is finally determined, by a persuasion, that to depart and to be with Christ is far better.

Under the former head of our subject we have shewn, that in general the desire of departing out of this world is not the common experience of the young Christian; especially those who have zeal, health, and opportunity of promoting the interest of Christ. This might incline some to question the laudableness of the desire at any other time; but such an inference is certainly unreasonable.

As we become better acquainted with the depravity of human nature, and find that we have hearts deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; as we experience how

ill calculated the present state is to a life of holiness, and the deception of some who profess to be religious; these circumstances detach our affections from the objects of this world, and we determine that to depart and to be with Christ is far better.

But our heavenly Father will not treat the desire with contempt, supposing that it should have been cherished by a long course of afflictions. And in all probability we shall find more of this genuine sentiment among afflicted saints, than can be found in the world beside.

When persons who have been exceedingly active in the church of God, are laid aside by infirmity, they find, that independent of being able in some respect or other to further the gospel, life is a burthen; allowing that they enjoy some tokens of the favour of God, yet their desire will be to depart and to be with Christ which is far better.

Had not our dear young friend been the subject of great afflictions, the desire to depart in the bloom of life would not have been so strong; but concluding that her short race was almost run, or rather that it was the will of God to call her out of this world, she not only avoided murmuring, but she acquiesced in his righteous pleasure; yea, she "desired
to

to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

It was the Holy Spirit that had made the gospel effectual to her conversion, and salvation; and therefore it was not a fruitless wish, or like the desire of the hypocrite that shall perish for ever. This holy disposition would, without doubt, had she lived, have ripened into all the amiable graces that adorn the disciple of Jesus, and raise him so much above the man that knows not God, or the mere formalist in religion. Her determination, in the strength of Divine grace, was, that if the Lord in tender mercy should restore her health to her, to live to the honour of Christ, and therefore she would frequently say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—Though sometimes she appeared in a strait betwixt two, yet her mind was finally determined, that "to depart, and to be with Christ, was far better."

Our text has occasioned much controversy, but it is not our province at this time to give the different opinions of authors.

I. The apostle speaks of departing, and of being with Christ, which can by no means be applicable to his body.

II. That when he should enjoy the company of Christ, he should be far better.

I. The first question is, Where is Christ? And here we have such a cloud of witnesses as is equal to demonstration: witnesses, that the possibility of their deceiving us, would have been a greater miracle than has been wrought since the creation of the world. The ascension of Christ is witnessed by the uniform testimony of the apostles. The evangelist Mark, says, that "He (that is, Christ) was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." Luke, the accurate historian and disciple, says, "And it came to pass, while he blessed his disciples, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." Peter, in his faithful sermon to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, speaking of Christ, says, "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Paul, the apostle, who was once favoured with a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ by a peculiar revelation, says, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us," Heb. ix.

24.

The language of our text appears to convey a very different idea of the state of the soul after

after death, than some who profess to be Christians have believed and published to the world. They say that the soul sleeps until the resurrection of the dead. By this assertion, we imagine that they involve themselves in a difficulty not unlike the following.—The departed saint sleeps in the dust until the resurrection; the departed saint is present with Christ; therefore Christ will remain in the dust until the resurrection. But in the judgment of charity, we cannot imagine that this is their sentiment; but at the same time we profess that their explaining the scriptures, in a manner to substantiate the doctrine of the soul's sleeping with the body, appears to be ambiguous to us.

We should be inclined to think, that if the apostle had been aware that ever the subject of the soul's happiness, when freed from the bondage of corruption, would have become controverted, he could not possibly have been more decisive than he is, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord:" and again, "Therefore, (says he) we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 6, 8. We will not assume any advantages above those who differ from us, either in
our

our judgments, or our acquirements; but we cannot help thinking that the apostle, by the pronoun, we, means the souls of believers, and that he considers the body as the habitation, or as he calls it, their home. That it was the sentiment of all the apostles, and was made manifest by the superior light of the gospel, by which life and immortality were brought to light, appears by their several writings. That it was a matter of great consolation to them, and enabled them to brave dangers; to be reconciled to the loss of the comforts of life; to be considered as the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things; and by which they counted not their lives dear, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the work of the ministry that was committed to them.

How strange is it, that after all the searches and researches; the prayers and intercessions of the best of men; after the longing desires, and frequent importunities, of dying saints, to know the truth; we say, how exceedingly strange it is, that the martyrs, and the most eminent saints, should have died in the dark, and still remain in a state of insensibility.

By being with Christ, we understand, being admitted into the presence of Christ; received up into heaven; enjoying that mansion that
was

was prepared for us before the foundation of the world. This, beloved brethren, I pledge myself, was the sentiment and the expectation of our dear departed sister. When in feeble accents she said any thing about desiring to depart, and to be with Christ, she really thought, that "When the earthly house of her tabernacle should be dissolved, she should have a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." Soon she expected to see him, that was once a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; but who must reign, until all his enemies are put under his feet. And I doubt not but you, my dear hearers, believe, with me, that she has not been disappointed; she has, we trust, seen him whom she loved, and for whom she thought to die would be gain.—If this foundation should once be removed, what distress would fill the minds of afflicted and dying saints, who are impatient to see him, "Whom having not seen they love, in whom though now they see him not, yet believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Death may be compared to a journey or a voyage; and when the Christian takes his departure, he neither expects to be confined, in what is called purgatory, for the purifying his soul, nor to be detained in the dust, body and soul, until the resurrection of the dead.

Soon

Soon he hopes to reach the blissful shore,
Where storms and dangers fright no more.

II. To be with Christ is far better.

When we seriously consider the usefulness and happiness of the apostle's situation, we can by no means conclude that to be in a state of insensibility, which must be the case if the soul sleep with the body, could be far better than his situation while living. And here I must beg leave to introduce a note of Dr Guise upon the text. He says, "If the soul were to sleep, or be in a state of insensibility at death, till the general resurrection of the body, the apostle could have hoped for no more advantage by dying soon, than if he were to have lived many years longer; and consequently could have been in no strait, between a desire of living here for the service of Christ, or dying, to enjoy the happiness of being with him in his glory; nor could he have imagined, in this view of things, that it would have been exceedingly far better, for himself to die out of hand, than to live longer on earth."

Our best ideas of what spirit is, are but imperfect; yet the distinction in the sacred scriptures is so clear, that when we borrow our notions from that infallible book, we need not fear of falling into an error.

It is true, we read of the "spirits of just men

men made perfect," and there can be no doubt that this refers to their heavenly enjoyments. From these few passages of scripture, it appears that the separate state of the soul is clearly revealed. Let us now enquire into the declaration of the apostle. "To be with Christ, which is far better."

We have negatively shewn the advantage that we obtain in dying; as being freed from the body of sin, and leaving a troublesome world behind us, and this we hope will suffice. But to be with Christ will be far better,

1. Because our knowledge will be perfect and complete.

How, comparatively, little does the wisest man on earth know! We are strangers to perfection, in all our actions, in all our words, and in all our thoughts. The most simple science, or the meanest art, contains heights and depths that the most profound philosopher has never yet explored. And if our imperfection be discoverable in such things, how much more so is it when we contemplate heavenly and divine things. Our knowledge in heaven will be refined and very extensive. We shall be unacquainted with impure objects. In this world we know many things by painful experience. We meet with disappointment; we carry about with us hearts that are deceitful

ful above all things, and desperately wicked. But in heaven we shall know nothing of such gross and impure things. We shall have a more extensive knowledge of the great mystery of our holy religion, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, united in the Godhead ; for we shall see him as he is. " And when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

In the pursuit of knowledge we often find such lassitude of body, that we are compelled to give over our studies, because fatigue has laid fast hold of us ; but in heaven we shall not be cumbered with flesh and blood. Thus shall we be fitted for the contemplation of immortal objects, and as we shall be much nearer the fountain of intelligence, there can remain no doubt of our knowledge being much more extensive, than there is a probability of attaining in this world.

Nor can we with propriety think that the means of information will be wanting. That glorious God who has so highly favoured us here, will supply us with such rich communications of his Holy Spirit, when we join the church triumphant, that all that we know now may be considered as nothing to what we hope to know. There we shall know those distinguished intelligences who are called cherubim

rubim and seraphim. We shall see and know those angels that were "ministering spirits," and who held us up in their arms, and ministered unto us as the heirs of salvation. There we shall know the redeemed out of all nations and tongues under heaven; and we shall be known by them.

Then the mysteries of providence shall be disclosed, and we shall be fully acquainted with the wisdom of God's designs in all the trials and afflictions, wherewith we have been exercised while on this side Jordan.

Here, as the wise man observes, "He that increaseth in knowledge increaseth in sorrow;" because the greater light the mind receives, the greater discoveries it has of its native imperfection. But in heaven we shall survey the glories of the most sublime objects and never-fading delights, and be filled with wonder and admiration.

2. To be with Christ will be far better, because our enjoyments will be the most pure, satisfying and durable.

Here we require a constant supply of food, raiment, and sleep, for the support of the body; and these may be called necessary enjoyments! But in heaven our food will consist, in our souls being replenished with tokens of the approbation of our Heavenly Father.

Unfulfilled glories, new discoveries of the grandeur, dignity, and excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ will constantly break forth upon our eyes. We shall be transported with beholding the order and worship of the pure inhabitants, and shall mingle our songs and honours with justified spirits, in ascribing to him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, salvation and glory for ever and ever. Then we shall drink from that crystal river, the streams whereof have so often refreshed us in our pilgrimage. "There the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, shall lead us to fountains of living waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."

These pleasures will be perfectly satisfying. There will be no night, nor any want of the light of the sun; for God will be the light of the place, and we shall be satisfied with his light. We shall be strangers to impatience, and shall never be cloyed with participating in the pleasures of the place. The royal Psalmist once said, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness;" plainly indicating that all our enjoyments here are unsatisfying, as they are at best only sips from the several rivulets; but there we shall drink at the fountain head. The "tree of life," that is in the midst, will regale our ardent spirits, and we shall flourish in

in eternal bloom. We have never read that the heavenly inhabitants are dissatisfied with their situation, and the best reason we can assign is, that their enjoyments are admirably adapted to the purity of their natures. They are full of holiness, and soon we hope to be like them.

Our enjoyments will be perpetual. No intervals of sorrow, disappointment, temptation, or affliction; no ensnaring world, no fascinating charm to make us vain for a single moment; but pure, satisfying, and eternal delights, will be our portion. These will never be exhausted; but after we have employed millions of ages, in contemplating the adorable Object of our salvation; and have received from his liberal hand ten thousand times ten thousand blessings; yet it will be an infiniteness, like God himself, who remains unchangeably the same for ever.

Let me now close the subject by a very short improvement.

1. It is a truth that we must all depart out of this world,

Daily observation confirms our minds in this that man is mortal. Death visits our neighbourhood, and sometimes his shafts reach our own habitations. An indulgent father, who is the only support of his numerous family, is arrest-

arrested by the "king of terrors," and hurried away to the place appointed for all living. Sometimes a beloved child, the centre of our earthly comforts, is seized by the insatiable foe, and, strange to tell, our expectations are blasted in the twinkling of an eye.

In the case before us, our dear young sister, like the sun, arose with vigour, and promised a long day; but alas! she went down before she had half arrived at the meridian of life. When young persons quit the stage of life, we should be much affected with the subject of dying; and such providences accomplish the truth of that declaration, that informs us, that "it is appointed unto man once to die." As we are morally certain that we shall at some time or other fall into the arms of death, altho' we know not the time, the place, or by what means our death will be effected, this is known only to God, yet it ought to be our greatest concern, now, that when we depart we may "be with Christ which is far better." What a sublime prayer David uses in order to improve an event so awful as death. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Permit me to drop a word to you who are in the younger part of life. You will remember, that she who is the subject of this funeral dis-

discourse, was but a short time since as healthy as any of you are now; but alas, what an alteration will a very short affliction make; but above all, what an alteration has death made. The pleasure that you have had in her company and conversation, you will never have again on this side eternity. "The places that knew her once, will know her no more for ever." May you be seriously affected with these important circumstances, and apply to Jesus Christ for complete salvation.

2. It will be a melancholy departure, if we are destitute of the knowledge of Christ, and an interest in his great salvation.

Death would in many cases be desirable, "if when men die, at once they cease to be." But such who are ignorant of the spirituality of the moral law, and who manifest no love to Christ, by believing the glorious gospel, they are while living strangers to solid happiness, and when they die, they are enveloped in darkness and misery. A conscience that forebodes nothing but gloom and torment cannot fail to fear to die; and no wonder that ungodly men appear so unwilling to quit this life. Nothing awaits such but a fearful looking for judgment, to be executed on all those who know not God, nor obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. How terrible is the thought
to

to be banished from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power, and yet forbid to die. Annihilation, which in other respects would be considered an evil that would embitter the comforts of life, would, to the unbeliever, be a peculiar favour. The scripture speaks of such, who, conscious of their guilt and rebellion, shall "call for rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the presence of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the Lamb for ever and ever."

Death, oh who can describe the horrors of it! How melancholy will that soul find it, that has no God. When on quitting the clay tenement it should be so infatuated, as to expect to be admitted within the pearly gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, it should hear the voice of insulted Omnipotence say, "Depart from me thou worker of iniquity, I never knew you." Such an unexpected denunciation would be like a thunderbolt that would dash the soul down to its gloomy prison, to mingle its groans with devils and unbelievers. "If he that despised Moses's law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted
the

the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace. For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 28, 29, 30, 31. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation." Think seriously, my fellow sinners, of these things, and beg of God, that it may be your determination to live to the honour and praise of Jesus Christ. May you from this time be "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."

Lastly, We learn that there is a reality in the Christian religion.

Blessed be God we have not followed a cunningly devised fable. Many, would to God I could say with truth all, of you know that the religion you profess is the religion of God. You are by no means desirous to pry into the secret counsels of the Almighty, to know the time of your dissolution: Sufficient it is for you to hold fast your confidence firm to the end, being persuaded that faithful is he that hath called you into the fellowship of his gospel, who also will preserve you unto the day of Christ.

And

And you, my dear friends, who have experienced this bereaving providence in depriving you of your earthly all, remember, that it does not become you to sorrow as those without hope, for your beloved daughter, believing that as she sleeps in Jesus, God will bring her with him at the last day. There we hope to see her ourselves, and to mingle our adorations with her's, when we fall prostrate before the throne of God and the Lamb.

And may we leave, when we die, as honourable a testimony behind us, that we are gone, "to be with Christ, which is far better."



FINIS.